

***TOWN OF NEWFIELDS BOARD OF SELECTMEN
PUBLIC HEARING – PROPOSED PISCASSIC
GREENWAY MANAGEMENT PLAN
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2008***

The Public Hearing was called to order at 7:05pm. Selectmen present were: Wes Moore and Michael Woodworth. Others present included: Newfields representatives to the Piscassic Greenway Management Plan Advisory Committee – Michael Price and Steve Shope; and Town Planner Clay Mitchell. Ellen Snyder and Karin Rubin of the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire provided the Powerpoint presentation and Phil Auger of the Rockingham County Conservation Commission was available to answer questions. Selectman James McIlroy was unable to attend the hearing as he was out of town on business.

Karin Rubin gave a review of this history of the Piscassic Greenway and Cole Property purchases and explained that the Management Plan would include both properties. The purchase of these properties put 385 acres into conservation land.

Partners involved in the purchase of these properties included the Town of Newfields, the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire (formerly the Rockingham Land Trust), the Trust for Public Land, NOAA's Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program, NH State Wildlife Grants, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Town of Newmarket, and private gifts and donations.

Each easement deed on these properties requires a Management and Stewardship Plan to guide the properties' stewardship of natural features and public uses. The Piscassic Greenway deed requires that management be guided by an Advisory Committee and that the Town of Newfields approve the Plan. The submitted Draft Plan includes both properties in a single document for the sake of coordinated management.

The Management goals include:

- Water Quality: protect present and future public water supplies and the environmental values dependent on water quality and quantity
- Wildlife Habitat: protect wildlife habitats, including riparian forest, riverine, wetlands, fields, and forested uplands, and associated wildlife species

- **Biological Integrity:** protect the integrity and diversity of natural plant communities, including the Piscassic River floodplain, tributary riparian system, rich upland forests, and associated rare plants and animals
- **Recreation:** maintain open spaces for scenic enjoyment and limited low-impact, transitory, non-wheeled, non-commercial outdoor recreation that preserves the conservation purposes
- **Farm Soils:** conserve the fertile farmland soils and agricultural viability of Cole's fields
- **Productive Forests:** maintain healthy, productive, sustainable, and biologically diverse forests

In its major recommendations, the Plan considers the natural capacity of the land on an ecological timescale, and its current regional context of widespread human development that has fragmented habitats and hastened the decline of certain species. The Plan considers this a unique opportunity to manage the property for its wildlife habitats and to restore many natural features. Recommendations on cutting vegetation are to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat and protect species of conservation concern, to maintain the health of the forest and associated habitats, or to create public recreational trails consistent with the above goals.

- **Habitat Management strategies are employed in specified areas:**

Actively-Managed Areas: maintain open field characteristics and biodiversity; restore forests to a more natural, multi-aged, structurally-diverse condition and/or maintain habitat conditions that are regionally in decline and that support wildlife species of conservation concern; activities to occur on a 20 year cycle

Modified Reserves: some management may occur on a 20-100+ year cycle with the goal of maintaining riparian buffers, significant wildlife habitats, and uncommon natural communities

Reserves: to be influenced by natural processes with little or no human intervention, and with the goal of protecting water quality and the ecological integrity of wetland systems

- **Invasive Species Control:** avoid native habitat degradation by monitoring for and removing non-native plant species such as glossy buckthorn, autumn olive, Japanese barberry, etc.
- **Trail Creation and Maintenance:** maintain two trails for recreational pedestrian, horseback, and mountain biking, and snowmobile use; create and maintain a network of footpaths for recreational pedestrian use

- Parking and Kiosk Establishment & Maintenance: create and maintain a small gravel lot on the Cole Farm to serve as the properties' main entrance and contain educational signage
- Wildlife and Plant Inventorying & Monitoring: engage professional and volunteers in completing wildlife surveys for a more thorough and sustained understanding of the properties' species and natural communities
- Boundary and Access Maintenance: regularly blaze and post signs along property boundaries and re-affirm external rights-of-way

Ellen Snyder explained that there would be three footpaths of varying length for pedestrians only. The snowmobile trail will also accommodate mountain bikes, horses, and snowshoes. Another southern trail is being considered as a footpath only. This trail could be changed to include mountain bikes and horses at a later time.

There is an issue with the east-west connector for the snowmobile trail where it intersects the beaver dam. Right now the snowmobiles are able to go across the ice on the pond, but this is not feasible for mountain bikes or horses. The trail will not be re-routed at this time, but may be re-routed at some future date. There was talk of putting in a plank bridge which would work for walkers, mountain bikes, or horses. However, it would not be wide enough to accommodate snowmobiles.

Proceeds from logging and/or farming were discussed. The easements state that any proceeds from the Piscassic Greenway will be deposited into the Management Trust Account. This account will be used to maintain the properties. No income is expected in the first few years, but there will be substantial costs. Included in the costs will be the parking lot, signs, etc.

Phil Auger stated that the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire has to go through the same channels as any other property owner for wetlands impact, timber harvesting, etc.

Once the Management Plan is approved by the Selectmen any updates would go through the Newfields Conservation Commission. The Town will be kept informed of any changes to the plan or properties. The Management Plan will be reviewed every ten years.

The Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire must receive comments from the Selectmen by March 17th, 2008. Final approval of the Plan must be completed by April 21st, 2008.

The Selectmen thanked Brian Hart and his team for the Management Plan that reflects the many issues discussed over a two year timeframe. Steve Shope and Michael Price were also thanked for their time and effort representing the Town during this process.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy J. Spencer
Administrative Assistant